

Peace Counsel For Mennonite Youth

Henry A. Fast, Executive Peace Secretary

These are critical times. People everywhere are greatly disturbed about the situation created by this war. Christian young people are especially troubled. What position shall we take in this crisis and toward the serious issues the war constantly raises? they ask. We don't like war or the war method. We think it is utterly wrong and completely unchristian. We are sure there must be a better way than the method of violence and hate and war. We believe Jesus showed us this better way. In fact, we believe His way of life is the only way to peace and the only answer to the problem of war.

But what can we do to show that we really trust Jesus and believe that His way is really the true way of life, even in the crisis of war? What service can we render in such a disturbed time that will give us opportunity to live this conviction and to express our Christian concern for people and our desire to build relations of peace and justice and goodwill among men?

In response to earnest and repeated requests like these and in order to help Christian young people to think their way through to a sound and satisfying answer to their problem we suggest three things as of basic importance in determining one's position:

I. Scriptural Basis.

We need to be certain of our ground in these days and for this reason we need a sound Scriptural basis for our convictions. We should think through carefully and clearly and know from memory important passages like the following:

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| Thou shalt not kill (Re-emphasized by Jesus, Mt.19:18) | Exod. 20:13 |
| Blessed are the merciful— | Mt. 5:7 |
| Blessed are the peacemakers— | Mt. 5:9 |
| But I say unto you, Resist not— | Mt. 5:38, 39 |
| But I say unto you, Love your enemies— | Mt. 5:43, 44 |
| Whatsoever ye would that men should do— | Mt. 7:12 |
| Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself— | Mt. 22:37, 39 |
| They that take the sword— | Mt. 26:52 |
| But if ye do not forgive— | Mk. 11:26 |
| A new commandment I give unto you— | Jn. 13:34, 35 |
| My kingdom is not of this world— | Jn. 18:36 |
| We must obey God rather than men— | Acts 5:29 |
| Render to no man evil for evil but—overcome evil with good. | Rom. 12:17-21 |
| We do not war after the flesh— | 2 Cor. 10:3, 4 |
| Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example— | 1 Pet. 2:21, 23 |
| Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer— | 1 Jn. 3:15 |
| Note other passages like: Mt. 5:21, 22; Mt. 5:33, 37; 1 Thess. 5:15, and the like. | |

Note particularly that the whole spirit and teaching of Jesus is entirely contrary to the spirit and method of war. We become true children of God only as we learn to love our enemies.

II. Personal Convictions.

We need to think our way through to great basic **personal** convictions on which we feel certain we can take our stand. For example:

1. As a Christian my supreme loyalty belongs to Jesus Christ. That means that I, conscientiously and consistently and at whatever cost to myself, try to follow Him and His way of love in my daily life, in wartime no less than in peacetime. It also means that I resolutely refuse to do anything which conflicts with my loyalty to Him.
2. In the sight of God human life is infinitely precious, and so I must not do anything that will destroy human life or harm personality. On the contrary I must do all I can to preserve life and to help people to rise to their full possibilities as children of God and helpful members in society.
3. Love is the law of God's kingdom. Jesus taught us to say: "Our Father" and I cannot honestly say it after Him and then act or think in an unbrotherly manner toward any human being. Christ-like love must control all my life and my relations.
4. War and the whole war method is sin. It teaches men to hate and destroy and kill. It is a complete denial of Christ and His way of love and so I can have no part in it. "There is no Christian way to kill a man."

5. I love my country. I know what blessings come from good government. I also recognize my responsibility toward the government and I am eager to do my part in helping to maintain good government and in furthering the best interests of my country. Believing that peace is for the best interests of the country I am sure I am showing my truest patriotism when I work for relations of peace and goodwill both within the country and without in its relations with other nations. But I cannot approve or have any part in any course my country may take which in my judgment is harmful to its own best interests or the best interests of humanity. And I cannot submit to any demands which would violate my best Christian insight and conscience. I must obey God more than men.

6. I am glad to be a member of a church which for centuries has held faithfully to its conviction that war and the whole war system was unchristian and has been willing to pay the price for that conviction. I want to be worthy of the high faith, courage and steadfastness of our forefathers. I am also glad to be part of a larger fellowship, (the Society of Friends and the Church of the Brethren and a large number of people in other denominations,) which shares our conviction and our concern.

7. I realize it will not be easy to live up to my Christian convictions at whatever cost to myself and to help build a world in harmony with the spirit and teaching of

Jesus. Like an athlete trains to run a race so I will need to discipline my body to keep it well and strong, my mind to keep it clear and alert. And my spirit will need especially the discipline of prayer and of study of the Scriptures in order to accumulate that reserve of inner strength which will equip me with resources sufficient for the need.

III. Plan of Service.

Each one needs to decide for himself, after careful consideration, what service he personally can render without violating his Christian conscience and conviction and yet give a positive and significant expression of his faith in the Jesus way of life. The decisions will doubtless vary but probably every young person would agree that he could render:

1. Service meeting a real human need which is not a part of or under the control of the military machine.
2. Service under a civilian board or under an organization of the Historic Peace Churches like the following: Relief of war sufferers; relief of refugees or evacuated civilian populations; reconstruction of war-stricken areas; resettlement of refugees; reclamation or forestry services in the United States or elsewhere; relief and reconstruction in local communities in the United States; medical and health services in connection with any of these projects; farm service; and the like.

3. Service under the American Friends Service Committee.

4. Service projects in strife-ridden or poverty-stricken areas whose purpose is the re-building of communities on a self-respecting, self-supporting, cooperative basis.

5. Services in home communities everywhere whose purpose is the building of harmonious, cooperative neighborhoods in which the Christian spirit of mutual love and understanding and fairness prevails. Communities, transformed by the power of the Christian faith, in which there is a genuine concern for the well-being of each and of all are the strength of our American democracy and a protection against all kinds of radical elements and violence and revolution.

In short, I am ready to render constructive service to any fellowman in need regardless of the cost or danger to myself but I cannot take part in any effort whose purpose is the destruction of human life and values. I am not afraid to die. I am only unwilling to kill.

"If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." 2 Chron. 7:14.

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